

Telecommunications Commission Minutes - November 13, 2008

I. Call to Order

Chair Terry Lottes called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. in the County Administration conference room in the Administration Center, located at 1300 Courthouse Road.

II. Roll Call

The following members were present: Terry Lottes, Thomas Kimbrell, Alicia Knight and Jim Minor. Also in attendance were Marie Schuler representing Comcast; Gwen Sparks with Cox; and Catherine Hogan-Lewis from Verizon. Cathy Riddle and Michele Lansford, Public Information Office, and Jason Hill, Information Technology Department, represented the County.

III. Presentations by the Public

There were no members of the public present.

IV. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Knight moved to approve the September 2008 minutes; Mr. Kimbrell seconded the motion; the motion was approved unanimously.

V. Members' Concerns

Mr. Minor said the recent issues he'd been dealing with on behalf of citizens had been resolved.

Ms. Knight asked Ms. Schuler if the company had settled the problem for Mr. Davis in Garrisonville Wood Estates. Sub-contractors had driven heavy equipment through his yard and let his dogs out of a fenced area while running fiber to his neighbor's house. Ms. Schuler said the 10-foot right-of-way is behind these homes, and that work in his yard cannot be avoided. She said she would determine if the construction is finished and if there is damage that needs to be repaired.

Mr. Lottes asked if Comcast added stipulations in subcontractors' contracts requiring them to give notice before they begin jobs. Ms. Schuler said she will see what this particular contract contained and will check to see if residents are noticed before major work takes place. Mr. Lottes commented that giving notice and explaining the type of work would prevent problems and help the process go more smoothly. Ms. Schuler agreed.

VI. Agenda Additions

There were no additions to the agenda.

VII. New Business

Model Ordinance Cable Franchise

Mr. Lottes asked members to e-mail their edits, comments and questions to Ms. Riddle or Ms. Lansford, who will in turn provide them to the County Attorney's Office. Ms. Knight said that the present cable ordinance was adopted in 1977, and that state and federal laws have changed since that time. Once the document is final, the Board will hold a public hearing.

Broadband

Ms. Hogan-Lewis reminded the members that she had provided links to the Governor's Web site with information about broadband issues that may be considered by the General Assembly and a handbook to help localities to assess their needs and make plans. She said that Stafford will find it difficult to qualify as an underserved location because three major cable providers are established in the County. She will provide the members with links to any broadband legislation that's pending. The commission asked staff to request that David Gayle, the County's legislative liaison, identify and track any legislation and submit a memo at the December 2008 meeting.

Mr. Lottes asked if someone would volunteer to draft a report about where Stafford is as far as broadband coverage, and what the next steps should be. The company representatives reminded the commission that maps and street-level details are proprietary and confidential. Ms. Hogan-Lewis said the Governor's office is preparing a statewide map showing overall coverage without naming specific providers.

Ms. Knight and Mr. Kimbrell will do the research and prepare a report.

Ms. Knight asked Ms. Hogan-Lewis if Verizon is pursuing wireless broadband networks, to which she responded yes. She said Stafford is covered, but subscribers have to buy cards and subscribe to the service. Verizon customers get a wireless router with the FiOS package.

Public Access Programming

Ms. Knight said she's been unable to meet with Mrs. Haines (a public programming producer) to discuss business plans, but will schedule a meeting as soon as possible. Mr. Lottes reported that Mr. Sullivan met with the superintendent of schools about setting up a non-profit to aid public access programming. Ms. Knight and Mr. Sullivan will try to coordinate their efforts and report back to the commission.

Other Business

Ms. Sparks said that Cox is adding channels, but the initiative will not move channels around or cost subscribers more money. She said she wanted to be sure the commission members approved of the methods to notify customers, including a crawl on the Weather Channel, notice on www.Cox.com, and an ad in the local newspaper. The members thanked her and said the notice was sufficient.

Jason Hill said that while the government broadcast channel on Cox is clear, the Comcast picture is snowy and has wavy lines. He talked to a Comcast technician who said the signal being sent out from the Administration Center is bad. Mr. Hill told the commission that the IT Department had tested the picture by broadcasting a program within the building that originated from the control room – the picture was clear.

He also talked to other County employees who subscribe to Comcast, and they said the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission meeting broadcasts are of poor quality at their homes. Ms. Schuler said she would call Jason on November 14th to get more details.

Mr. Hill reported that he and Diane Dollar with Verizon discussed running conduit in the Administration Center from the IT Department to the control room in the Board Chambers to utilize a DS3 line. Mr. Hill said he will be glad to do the job, but that Verizon should consider undertaking the work. Ms. Hogan-Lewis said she will ask her technical staff to complete the job, and that they will deal directly with Mr. Hill. The new line will allow Verizon to run both the government and schools channels over FiOS.

Ms. Knight asked Ms. Hogan-Lewis if Verizon is considering pulling out all copper wiring. She responded that that isn't an option at this time (the copper wire will be clipped only) because if even one customer wants to maintain DLS service it must be available. She said she'll e-mail the members a white paper that explains the issue.

VIII. Adjournment

At 8:00 p.m., Ms. Knight moved to adjourn the meeting; Mr. Kimbrell seconded the motion; it passed unanimously.